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Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities Public Hearing Testimony on AB 708

Good morning Chairman Hixson. I want to thank you for scheduling AB 708 and I appreciate the opportunity to join Senator Lassa in addressing you and the rest of the committee this morning.

The goal of AB 708 is to provide a tool to help in retaining more food animal veterinarians in Wisconsin. It is vital not only to our agricultural industry, but to overall food safety and to our public health system.

Wisconsin is seeing a trend that is playing out nationwide with more veterinarians choosing to leave food animal practice and instead choosing to practice on companion animals or small animals. Small animal practice essentially has better hours, isn't as labor intensive, and can be much more profitable.

At the same time more veterinarians are leaving food animal practice, fewer veterinary students are choosing to enter the food animal program at the UW School of Veterinary Medicine and other vet schools around the country. Combine that with the fact a large percentage of food animal veterinarians currently in practice are nearing retirement, and Wisconsin is faced with a major shortage.

A shortage of food animal veterinarians could potentially pose a major risk to the state's near \$60 billion agricultural industry and to food safety in general. Farmers who don't have reliable access to a food animal veterinarian may choose to not have their animals treated. This could result in a delay in the detection of a foreign animal disease, posing a major threat to the entire livestock population and potentially the food supply.

There is an effort underway not just at the state level, but nationally to develop a closer link between veterinary medicine and human medicine. Roughly 75% of the emerging diseases today are zoonotic, meaning they can transfer from the animal population into the human population. Food animal veterinarians are an extremely important link in the public health chain and can at times be the first to discover an emerging disease before it spreads rapidly through the human population. The University of Wisconsin recognizes this critical link and offers a dual DVM/MPH program to students.

(Medicine & Public Health)

AB 708 would add food animal veterinarians to the existing Health Professional Loan Assistance Program (HPLAP), which provides up to \$50,000 in loan forgiveness to doctors, dentists, and nurse practitioners who agree to practice in shortage areas. Students who graduate with a DVM have similar debt loads to students who graduate from

medical school and dental school and The HPLAP seems like the most logical fit for this program. We have talked with the School of Medicine and Public Health, where the HPLAP is administered, and they are supportive of what we are trying to do in AB 708.

AB 708 would allow a veterinarian who agrees to work at least 35 hours per week and devote at least 50% of their practice to treating food animals for up to four years to receive up to \$50,000 in loan forgiveness. We recognize that very few veterinarians practice strictly on food animals and a more typical rural practice also treats small animals and horses to help supplement their income and provide a much needed service to local residents.

Senator Lassa and I understand that this bill alone isn't going to solve the shortage of food animal veterinarians in the state, but it is a start. The School of Veterinary Medicine has a program, the Food Animal Medical Scholars Program, which provides undergraduate students who want to practice food animal veterinary medicine admission to the DVM program three years into their undergraduate studies. We hope the Food Animal Loan Forgiveness Program will provide an incentive for those same students, and other practitioners, to remain in food animal medicine once they settle in a community and establish a practice.

We recognize the state's fiscal limitations and the bill simply creates the program and does not provide for an appropriation at the present time. It is our hope that as the state's fiscal situation improves, an appropriation will follow closely behind and that veterinarians practicing food animal medicine can begin to take advantage of the program.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning and I would urge the committee to pass AB 708.



JULIE LASSA

STATE SENATOR

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
Assembly Bill 708
Wednesday, February 24, 2010

Good morning Chairman Hixson and committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 708 which creates a food animal veterinarian loan assistance program administered by the UW System Board of Regents.

When it comes to public health not many people think about food animal veterinarians and the important role they play in keeping the public safe. Nor do most people realize that the United States and Wisconsin currently have a shortage of these veterinarians and that this shortage will grow in future years due to retirements. Food animal veterinarians are not only critical to Wisconsin farmers and our agricultural industry; they are an early warning system for public health officials. Nearly 75% of diseases, like avian flu, are zoonotic meaning they can spread from animals to humans. Veterinarians see diseases in the animal population before they spread to the human population, giving the public health community a better chance to prepare and prevent a massive outbreak.

During recent years an increasing number of veterinary school graduates are choosing to focus their practice on small and companion animals rather than food and large animals because the hours and pay are better and they can work in suburban areas. This problem, along with the impending retirements, poses a challenge to Wisconsin's agricultural industry and is a public health risk for our state's citizens.

Food animal veterinarians are critical to maintaining a strong and healthy livestock population. Farmers who do not have access to a food animal veterinarian may suffer significant economic losses while trying to locate a vet, choose to hire unqualified individuals to treat their animals or may not have their animals treated at all. This could result in a delay in the detection of animal diseases, posing a major health threat to livestock and different sectors of our agricultural industry as well as pose a significant threat to human health.

Assembly Bill 708 allows a veterinarian who agrees to work at least 35 hours per week and devotes at least 50% of their practice to treating food animals for up to four years to receive up to \$50,000 in loan forgiveness. We believe that this program will attract additional veterinary school graduates to practice in the food animal field.

Although AB 708 does not provide funding for this program, Representative Tauchen and I believe it can be funded when the state's financial situation improves in the future. We believe the state's current budget difficulties should not stop the legislature from putting the framework in place for this program which is so important to both animal and human health.

Thank you for your time.

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 708

Delivered by Adam Ward

February 24, 2010

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me time to speak to you today. My name is Adam Ward. I am a third year veterinary medical student at UW Madison. I grew up on a small dairy farm just over 2 hours north of here near Arpin, a rural part of Wood County. I graduated from UW-River Falls with a degree in Dairy Science before starting school here in Madison.

I have spent my life around farms and animals. Having lived in a few different regions of Wisconsin, I have had the privilege of seeing our strong dairy industry continue to provide jobs and income for the people of this state. Veterinarians are a critical and necessary component to allow those producers to be successful, to maintain their animals' health and welfare, and to safeguard public health.

Becoming a veterinarian is expensive! Quite frankly the thought of graduating with enough debt to match the purchase of a house is rather daunting. But it is a profession that I am proud and excited to call myself a member.

The beautiful thing about obtaining a DVM is that as a degree, it is quite versatile. I myself have been amazed at what options exist after graduation. Graduates have the option to enter several sectors of the profession—be it clinical practice, public health, or government. This is great for us to stretch our wings, but it also presents a myriad of options that may offer more lucrative pay than food animal practice.

As for my own plans following graduation, I don't know. I am considering exploring my passion for veterinary medicine by completing an internship and possibly a residency in large animal medicine. Maybe I'll jump right into a good food animal practice—there are plenty in Wisconsin. I've even tossed around the idea of taking off for a year to work abroad as a veterinarian in Australia, New Zealand, or Europe. My point is that my colleagues and I are interested in, and positioned to do, many great things. By securing passage and funding of this bill, you will be adding one more reason for graduates to consider food animal practice in Wisconsin.



A Snapshot of Wisconsin Horse Owners

- ✓ Our 325,000 horses are owned by 113,000 households
- ✓ Ownership is evenly spread across the state with the exception of the sparsely populated northern counties, which have somewhat fewer horse owners.

Median Number of Horses 3.0
 Median Value of Horses \$10,000
 Median Total Horse-Related Earnings \$300
 Median Total Horse-Related Expenses \$7,365

Economic Impact of Wisconsin's 325,000 horses

Value of horses in our state \$1.1 billion

The horse industry is a significant portion of Wisconsin's \$232 billion GDP (2007)

The equine industry annually generates...

- \$32 million in horse-associated revenues.
- \$799 million in expenses.
- \$1.4 billion in sales.

It provides 36,000 jobs that generate...

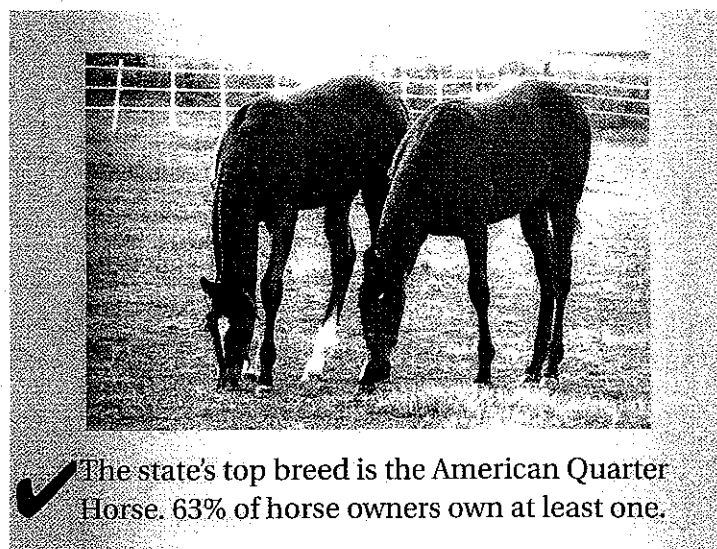
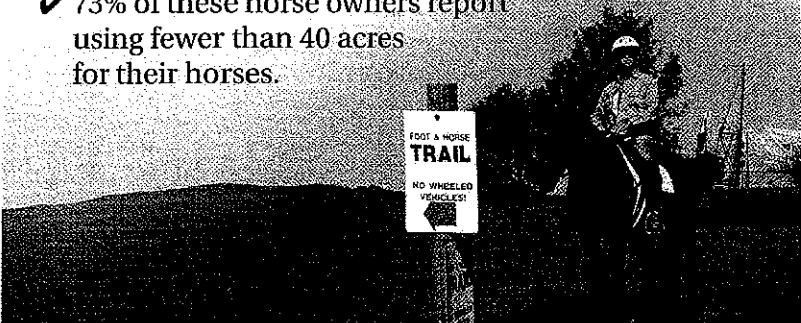
- \$286 million in labor income.
- \$373 million in total income.
- \$113 million in taxes (local + state + federal).

Horse enterprises...

- add \$3.25 billion to value of properties in Wisconsin.
- own \$85 million worth of equipment used with horses.
- would require \$2.2 billion to replace that equipment.

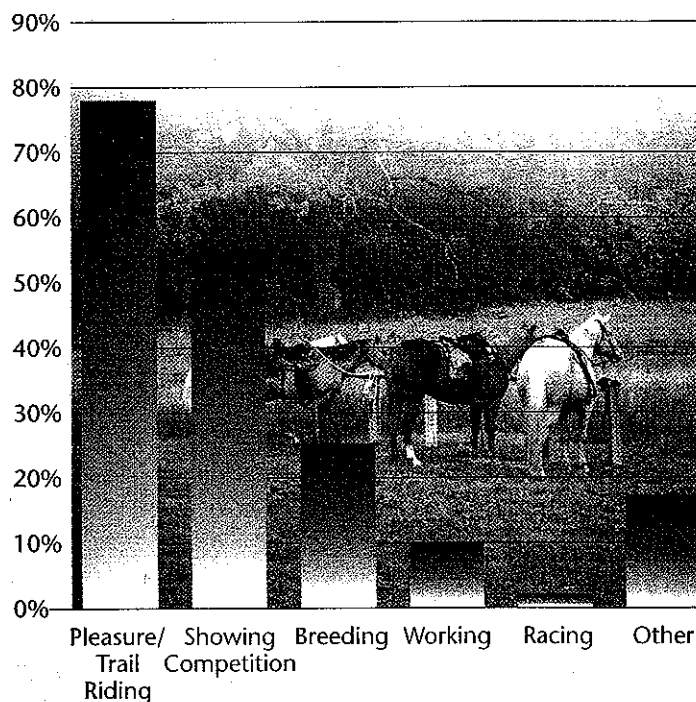
Equine Economic Impact on Property

- ✓ 9 out of 10 horse owners keep their horses on their own property.
- ✓ 73% of these horse owners report using fewer than 40 acres for their horses.

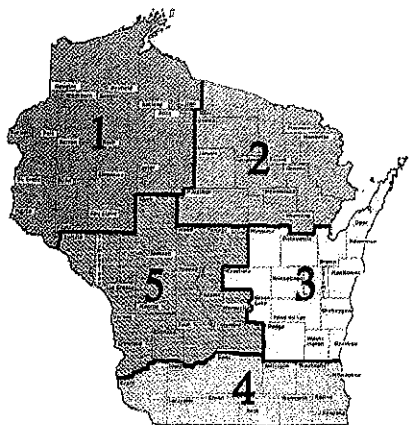


- ✓ The state's top breed is the American Quarter Horse. 63% of horse owners own at least one.

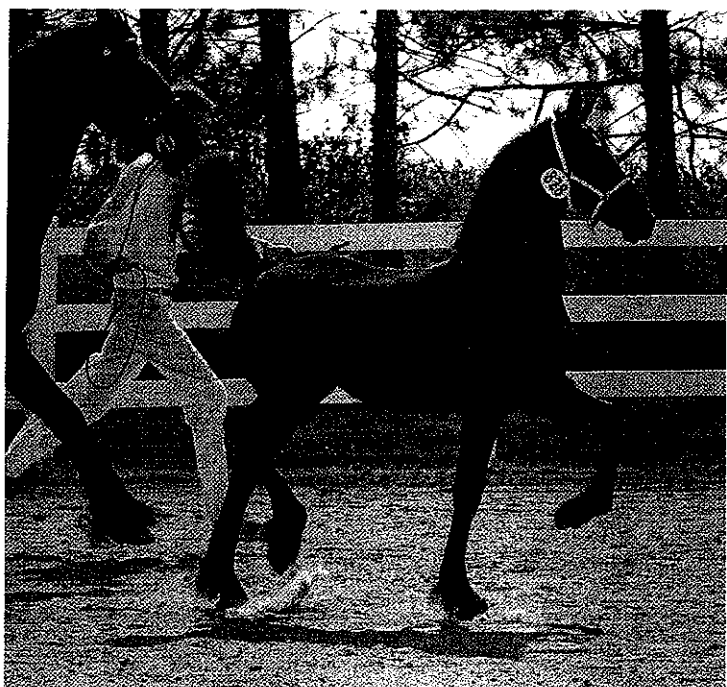
How Wisconsin Horse Owners Use Their Horses



Estimated Number and Percentages of Households with Horses by WSHC District



WSHC District	Estimated Number of Households with Horses	Percentage of Total Wisconsin Households with Horses
1	17,260 – 18,736	16%
2	10,069 – 11,011	10%
3	28,932 – 31,653	28%
4	20,566 – 22,695	20%
5	26,604 – 28,983	26%
Total	103,432 – 113,078	100%



The Wisconsin State Horse Council, Inc. is a non-profit organization representing horsemen and women and the equine industry. The WSHC promotes the horse through leadership, education, and service and takes a proactive role in the growth of the industry.



Wisconsin State Horse Council

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Horses in Wisconsin: *Serious Business*

Economic Impact = \$1.4 billion*

